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KING of the MAMOZEKEL



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By CHARLES G.D. ROBERTS







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THE  
KING OF THE MAMOZEKEL

## Roberts' Animal Stories

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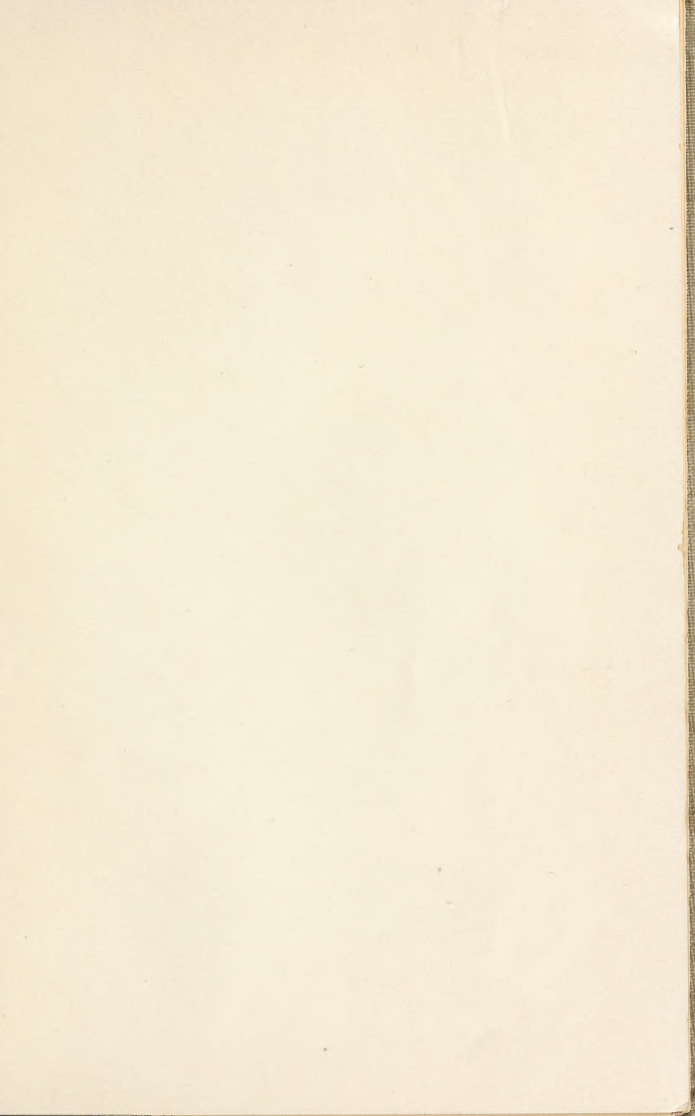
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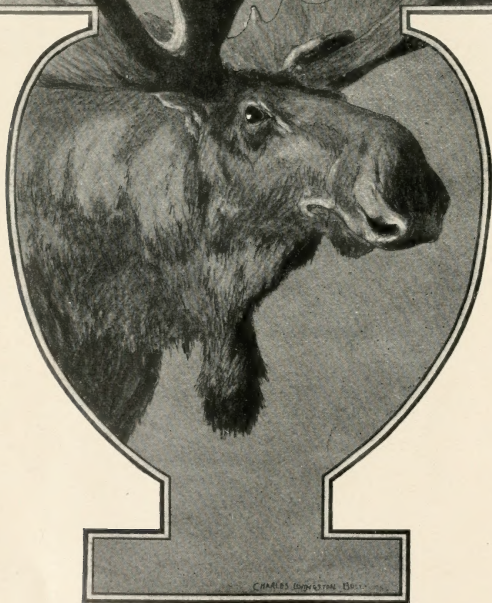
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THE KING  
OF THE  
MAMOZEKEL



CHARLES DUNSTON BOYD



Roberts' Animal Stories

# The King of the Mamozekel

BY

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

Author of "The Watchers of the Trails," "The Kindred  
of the Wild," "The Heart of the Ancient Wood,"  
"Barbara Ladd," "Poems," etc.

Illustrated by

CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL



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The King of the Mamozekel

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# THE KING OF THE MAMOZEKEL



## I.

WHEN the king of the Mamozekel barrens was born, he was one of the most ungainly of all calves, — a moose-calf.

In the heart of a tamarack swamp, some leagues south from Nictau Mountain, was a dry little knoll of hardwood and pine undiscovered by the hunters, out of the track of the hunting beasts. Neither lynx, bear, nor panther had tradition of it. There was little succulent undergrowth to tempt the moose and the caribou. But there the wild plum each summer fruited abundantly, and there a sturdy brotherhood of

beeches each autumn lavished their treasure of three-cornered nuts; and therefore the knoll was populous with squirrels and grouse. Nature, in one of those whims of hers by which she delights to confound the studious naturalist, had chosen to keep this spot exempt from the law of blood and fear which ruled the rest of her domains. To be sure, the squirrels would now and then play havoc with a nest of grouse eggs, or, in the absence of their chisel-beaked parents, do murder on a nest of young golden-wings; but, barring the outbreaks of these bright-eyed incorrigible marauders, — bad to their very toes, and attractive to their plummy tail-tips, — the knoll in the tamarack swamp was a haven of peace amid the fierce but furtive warfare of the wilderness.

On this knoll, when the arbutus breath of the northern spring was scenting the winds of all the Tobique country, the king was born, — a moose-calf more ungainly and of mightier girth and limb than any other moose-calf of the Mamo-

zekel. Never had his mother seen such a one, — and she a mother of lordly bulls. He was uncouth, to be sure, in any eyes but those of his kind, — with his high humped fore-shoulders, his long, lugubrious, overhanging snout, his big ears set low on his big head, his little eyes crowded back toward his ears, his long, big-knuckled legs, and the spindling, lank diminutiveness of his hindquarters. A grotesque figure, indeed, and lacking altogether in that pathetic, infantile winsomeness which makes even little pigs attractive. But any one who knew about moose would have said, watching the huge baby struggle to his feet and stand with sturdy legs well braced, “There, if bears and bullets miss him till his antlers get full spread, is the king of the Mamozekel.” Now, when his mother had licked him dry, his coat showed a dark, very sombre, cloudy, secretive brown, of a hue to be quite lost in the shadows of the fir and hemlock thickets, and to blend consummately with the colour of the tangled alder trunks

along the clogged banks of the Mamozekel.

The young king's mother was perhaps the biggest and most morose cow on all the moose ranges of northern New Brunswick. She assuredly had no peer on the barrens of the upper Tobique country. She was also the craftiest. That was the reason why, though she was dimly known and had been blindly hunted all the way from Nictau Lake, over Mamozekel, and down to Blue Mountain on the main Tobique, she had never felt a bullet wound, and had come to be regarded by the backwoods hunters with something of a superstitious awe. It was of her craft, too, that she had found this knoll in the heart of the tamarack swamp, and had guarded the secret of it from the herds. Hither, at calving time, she would come by cunningly twisted trails. Here she would pass the perilous hours in safety, unharassed by the need of watching against her stealthy foes. And when once she had led her calf away from the retreat,



she never returned to it, save alone, and in another year.

For three days the great cow stayed upon the knoll, feeding upon the overhanging branch tips of mountain-ash and poplar. This was good fodder, for buds and twigs were swollen with sap, and succulent. In those three days her sturdy young calf made such gains in strength and stature that he would have passed in the herd for a calf of two weeks' growth. In mid-afternoon of the third day she led the way down from the knoll and out across the quaking glooms of the tamarack swamp. And the squirrels in the budding branches chattered shrill derision about their going.

The way led through the deepest and most perilous part of the swamp; but the mother knew the safe trail in all its windings. She knew where the yielding surface of moss with black pools on either side was not afloat on fathomless ooze, but supported by solid earth or a framework of ancient tree roots. She

shambled onward at a very rapid walk, which forced the gaunt calf at her heels to break now and then into the long-striding, tireless trot which is the heritage of his race.

For perhaps an hour they travelled. Then, in a little, partly open glade where the good sound earth rose up sweet from the morass, and the mountain-ash, the viburnum, and the moose-wood grew thinly, and the ground was starred with spring blooms, — painted trillium and wake-robin, claytonia and yellow dog-tooth and wind-flower, — they stopped. The calf, tired from his first journeying, nursed fiercely, twitching his absurd stub of a tail, butting at his mother's udder with such discomforting eagerness that she had to rebuke him by stepping aside and interrupting his meal. After several experiences of this kind he took the hint, and put curb upon his too robust impatience. The masterful spirit of a king is liable to inconvenience its owner if exercised prematurely.

By this time the pink light of sunset

was beginning to stain the western curves of branch and stem and bud, changing the spring coolness of the place into a delicate riot of fairy colour and light, intervolving form. Some shadows deepened, while others disappeared. Certain leaves and blossoms and pale limbs stood out with a clearness almost startling, suddenly emphasised by the level rays, while others faded from view. Though there was no wind, the changed light gave an effect of noiseless movement in the glade. And in the midst of this gathering enchantment the mother moose set herself to forage for her own meal.

Selecting a slim young birch-tree, whose top was thick with twigs and greening buds, she pushed against it with her massive chest till it bent nearly to the ground. Then straddling herself along it, she held it down securely between her legs, moved forward till the succulent top was within easy reach, and began to browse with leisurely jaws and selective reachings out of her long, dis-

criminating upper lip. The calf stood close by, watching with interest, his legs sympathetically spread apart, his head swung low from his big shoulders, his great ears swaying slowly backward and forward, not together, but one at a time. When the mother had finished feeding, there were no buds, twigs or small branches left on the birch sapling; and the sunset colours had faded out of the glade. With dusk a chilly air breathed softly through the trees, and the mother led the way into a clump of thick balsam firs near the edge of the good ground. In the heart of the thicket she lay down for the night, facing away from the wind; and the calf, quick in perception as in growth, lay down close beside her in the same position. He did not know at the time the significance of the position, but he had a vague sense of its importance. He was afterward to learn that enemies were liable to approach his lair in the night, and that as long as he slept with his back to the wind, he could not be taken unawares. The wind



"THE CALF STOOD CLOSE BY, WATCHING WITH INTEREST."



might be trusted to bring to his marvelous nostrils timely notice of danger from the rear; while he could depend upon his eyes and his spacious, sensitive, unsleeping ears to warn him of anything ascending against the wind to attack him in front.

At the very first suggestion of morning the two light sleepers arose. In the dusk of the fir thicket the hungry calf made his meal. Then they came forth into the grayness of the spectral spring dawn, and the great cow proceeded as before to breast down a birch sapling for fodder. Before the sun was fairly up, they left the glade and resumed their journey across the swamp.

It was mid-morning of a sweet-aired, radiant day when they emerged from the swamp. Now, through a diversified country of thick forests and open levels, the mother moose swung forward on an undeviating trail, perceptible only to herself. Presently the land began to dip. Then a little river appeared, winding through innumerable alders, with here

and there a pond-like expansion full of young lily-leaves; and the future king of the Mamozekel looked upon his kingdom. But he did not recognise it. He cared nothing for the little river of alders. He was tired, and very hungry, and the moment his mother halted he ran up and nursed vehemently.



## II.

DELICATELY filming with the first green, and spicy-fragrant, were the young birch-trees on the slopes about the Mamozekel water. From tree-top to tree-top, across the open spaces, the rain-birds called to each other with long falls of melody and sweetly insistent iteration. In their intervals of stillness, which came from time to time as if by some secret and preconcerted signal, the hush was beaded, as it were, with the tender and leisurely staccatos of the chickadees. The wild kindreds of the Tobique country were all happily busy with affairs of spring.

While the great cow was pasturing on birch-twigs, the calf rested, with long legs tucked under him, on the dry, softly carpeted earth beneath the branches of a hemlock. At this pleasant pasturage

the mother moose was presently joined by her calf of the previous season, a sturdy bull-yearling, which ran up to her with a pathetic little bleat of delight, as if he had been very desolate and bewildered during the days of her strange absence. The mother received him with good-natured indifference, and went on pulling birch-tips. Then the yearling came over and eyed with curiosity the resting calf,—the first moose-calf he had ever seen. The king, unperturbed and not troubling himself to rise, thrust forward his spacious ears, and reached out a long, inquiring nose to investigate the newcomer. But the yearling was in doubt. He drew back, planted his fore hoofs firmly, and lowered and shook his head, challenging the stranger to a butting bout. The old moose, which had kept wary eye upon the meeting, now came up and stood over her young, touching him once or twice lightly with her upper lip. Then, swinging her great head to one side, she glanced at the yearling, and made a soft sound in her

throat. Whether this were warning or mere pertinent information, the yearling understood that his smaller kinsman was to be let alone, and not troubled with challenges. With easy philosophy, he accepted the situation, doubtless not concerned to understand it, and turned his thoughts to the ever fresh theme of forage.

Through the spring and summer the little family of three fed never far from the Mamozekel stream; and the king grew with astonishing speed. Of other moose families they saw little, for the mother, jealous and overbearing in her strength, would tolerate no other cows on her favourite range. Sometimes they saw a tall bull, with naked forehead, come down to drink or to pull lily-stems in the still pools at sunset. But the bull, feeling himself discrowned and unlordly in the absence of his antlers, paid no attention to either cows or calves. While waiting for autumn to restore to his forehead its superb palmated adornments, he was haughty and seclusive.

By the time summer was well established in the land, the moose-calf had begun to occupy himself diligently with the primer-lessons of life. Keeping much at his mother's head, he soon learned to pluck the tops of tall seeding grasses; though such low-growing tender herbage as cattle and horses love, he never learned to crop. His mother, like all his tribe, was too long in the legs and short in the neck to pasture close to the ground. He was early taught, however, what succulent pasturage of root and stem and leaf the pools of Mamozekel could supply; and early his sensitive upper lip acquired the wisdom to discriminate between the wholesome water-plants and such acrid, unfriendly growths as the water-parsnip and the spotted cowbane. Most pleasant the little family found it, in the hot, drowsy afternoons, to wade out into the leafy shallows and feed at leisure belly-deep in the cool, with no sound save their own comfortable splashings, or the shrill clatter of a kingfisher winging past up-stream.

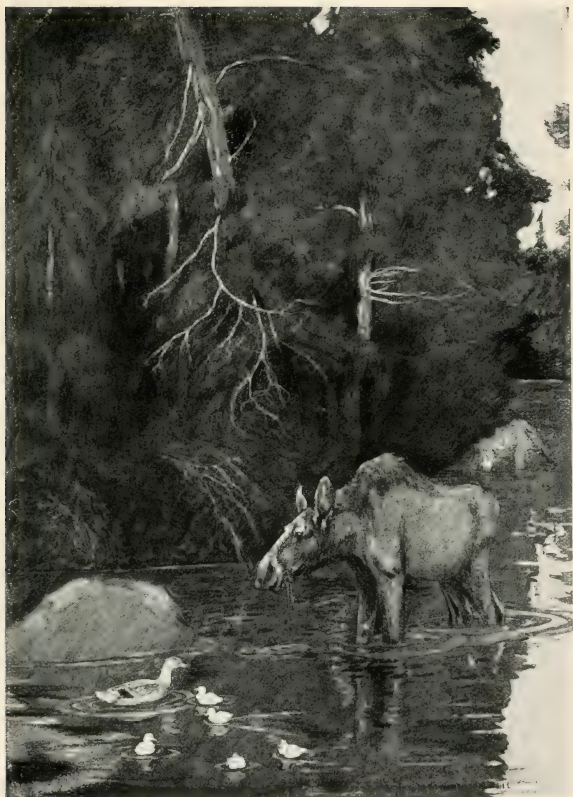
Their usual feeding hours were just before sunrise, a little before noon, and again in the late afternoon, till dark. The rest of the time they would lie hidden in the deepest thickets, safe, but ever watchful, their great ears taking in and interpreting all the myriad fluctuating noises of the wilderness.

The hours of foraging were also — for the young king, in particular, whose food was mostly provided by his mother — the hours of lesson and the hours of play. In the pride of his growing strength he quickly developed a tendency to butt at everything and test his prowess. His yearling brother was always ready to meet his desires in this fashion, and the two would push against each other with much grunting, till at last the elder, growing impatient, would thrust the king hard back upon his haunches, and turn aside indifferently to his browsing. Little by little it became more difficult for the yearling to close the bout in this easy way; but he never guessed that in no distant day the con-

tests would end in a very different manner. He did not know that, for a calf of that same spring, his lightly tolerated playfellow was big and strong and audacious beyond all wont of the wide-antlered kindred.

The young king was always athrill with curiosity, full of interest in all the wilderness folk that chanced to come in his view. The shyest of the furtive creatures were careless about letting him see them, both his childishness and his race being guarantee of good will. Very soon, therefore, he became acquainted, in a distant, uncomprehending fashion, with the hare and the mink, the wood-mouse and the muskrat; while the mother mallard would float amid her brood within a yard or two of the spot where he was pulling at the water-lilies.

One day, however, he came suddenly upon a porcupine which was crossing a bit of open ground, — came upon it so suddenly that the surly little beast was startled and rolled himself up into a round, bristling ball. This was a strange



“THE MOTHER MALLARD WOULD FLOAT AMID HER BROOD.”





phenomenon indeed! He blew upon the ball, two or three hard noisy breaths from wide nostrils. Then he was so rash as to thrust at it tentatively rather than roughly with his inquisitive nose,—for he was most anxious to know what it meant. There was a quiver in the ball; and he jumped back, shaking his head, with two of the sharp spines sticking in his sensitive upper lip.

In pain and fright, yet with growing anger, he ran to his mother where she was placidly cropping a willow-top. But she was not helpful. She knew nothing of the properties of porcupine quills. Seeing what was the matter, she set the example of rubbing her nose smartly against a stump. The king did likewise.

Now, for burrs, this would have been all very well; but porcupine quills—the malignant little intruders thrive under such treatment, and worked their way more deeply into the tender tissues. Smarting and furious, the young monarch rushed back with the purpose of stamping that treacherous ball of spines

to fragments under his sharp hoofs. But the porcupine, meanwhile, had discreetly climbed a tree, whence it looked down with scornful red eyes, bristling its barbed armory, and daring the angry calf to come up and fight. For days thereafter the young king suffered from a nose so hot and swollen that it was hard for him to browse, and almost impossible for him to nurse. Then came relief, as the quills worked their way through, one dropping out, and the other getting chewed up with a lily-root. But the young moose never forgot his grudge against the porcupine family; and catching one, years after, in a poplar sapling, he bore the sapling down and trod his enemy to bits. In his wrath, however, he did not forget the powers and properties of the quills. He took good care that none should pierce the tender places of his feet.

Some weeks after his meeting with the porcupine, when his nose and his spirits together had quite recovered, he made a new acquaintance. The moose

family had by this time worked much farther up the Mamozekel, into a region of broken ground, and steep up-thrusts of rock. One day, while investigating the world at a little distance from his mother and brother, he saw a large, curious-looking animal at the top of a rocky slope. It was a light brown-gray in colour, with a big, round face, high-tufted ears, round, light, cold eyes, long whiskers brushed back from under its chin, very long, sharp teeth displayed in its snarlingly open jaws, and big round pads of feet. The lynx glared at the young king, scornfully unacquainted with his kingship. And the young king stared at the lynx with lively, unhostile interest. Then the lynx cast a wary glance all about, saw no sign of the mother moose (who was feeding on the other side of the rock), concluded that this was such an opportunity as he had long been looking for, and began creeping swiftly, stealthily, noiselessly, down the slope of rocks.

Any other moose-calf, though of thrice

the young king's months, would have run away. But not so he. The stranger seemed unfriendly. He would try a bout of butting with him. He stamped his feet, shook his lowered head, snorted, and advanced a stride or two. At the same time, he uttered a harsh, very abrupt, bleating cry of defiance, the infantile precursor of what his mighty, forest-daunting bellow was to be in later years. The lynx, though he well knew that this ungainly youngster could not withstand his onslaught for a moment, was nevertheless astonished by such a display of spirit; and he paused for a moment to consider it. Was it possible that unguessed resources lay behind this daring? He would see.

It was a critical moment. A very few words more would have sufficed for the conclusion of this chronicle, but for the fact that the young king's bleat of challenge had reached other ears than those of the great lynx. The old moose, at her pasturing behind the rock, heard it too. Startled and anxious,

she came with a rush to find out what it meant ; and the yearling, full of curiosity, came at her heels. When she saw the lynx, the long hair on her neck stood up with fury, and with a roar she launched her huge, dark bulk against him. But for such an encounter the big cat had no stomach. He knew that he would be pounded into paste in half a minute. With a snarl he sprang backward, as if his muscles had been steel springs suddenly loosed ; and before his assailant was half-way up the slope, he was glaring down upon her from the safe height of a hemlock limb.

This, to the young king, seemed a personal victory. The mother's efforts to make him understand that lynxes were dangerous had small effect upon him ; and the experience advanced him not at all in his hitherto unlearned lesson of fear.

Even he, however, for all his kingly heart, was destined to learn that lesson, — was destined to have it so seared into his spirit that the remembrance should,

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from time to time, unnerve, humiliate, defeat him, through half the years of his sovereignty.

It came about in this way, one blazing August afternoon.

The old moose and the yearling were at rest, comfortably chewing the cud in a spruce covert close to the water. But the king was in one of those restless fits which, all through his calfhood, kept driving him forward in quest of experience. The wind was almost still; but such as there was blew up stream. Up against it he wandered for a little way, and saw nothing but a woodchuck, which was a familiar sight to him. Then he turned and drifted carelessly down the wind. Having passed the spruce thicket, his nostrils received messages from his mother and brother in their quiet concealment. The scent was companion to him, and he wandered on. Presently it faded away from the faintly pulsing air. Still he went on.

Presently he passed a huge, half-decayed windfall, thickly draped in shrub-

bery and vines. No sooner had he passed than the wind brought him from this dense hiding-place a pungent, unfamiliar scent. There was something ominous in the smell, something at which his heart beat faster; but he was not afraid. He stopped at once, and moved back slowly toward the windfall, sniffing with curiosity, his ears alert, his eyes striving to pierce the mysteries of the thicket.

He moved close by the decaying trunk without solving the enigma. Then, as the wind puffed a thought more strongly, he passed by and lost the scent. At once he swung about to pursue the investigation; and at the same instant an intuitive apprehension of peril made him shudder, and shrink away from windfall.

He turned not an instant too soon. What he saw was a huge, black, furry head and shoulders leaning over the windfall, a huge black paw, with knife-like claws, lifting for a blow that would break his back like a bulrush. He was already moving, already turning, and

with his muscles gathered. That saved him. Quick as a flash of light he sprang, wildly. Just as quickly, indeed, came down the stroke of those terrific claws. But they fell short of their intended mark. As the young moose sprang into the air, the claws caught him slantingly on the haunch. They went deep, ripping hide and flesh almost to the bone, — a long, hideous wound. Before the blow could be repeated, the calf was far out of reach, bleating with pain and terror. The bear, much disappointed, peered after him with little red, malicious eyes, and greedily licked the sweet blood from his claws.

The next instant the mother moose burst from her thicket, the long hair of her neck and shoulders stiffly erect with rage. She had understood well enough that agonised cry of the young king. She paused but a second, to give him a hasty lick of reassurance, then charged down upon the covert around the wind-fall. She knew that only a bear could have done that injury; and she knew,





"BUT THEY FELL SHORT OF THEIR INTENDED MARK."



without any help from ears, eyes, or nose, that the windfall was just the place for a bear's lying-in-wait. With an intrepidity beyond the boldest dreams of any other moose-cow on the Mamozekel, she launched herself crashing into the covert.

But her avenging fury found no bear to meet it. The bear knew well this mighty moose-cow, having watched her from many a hiding-place, and shrewdly estimated her prowess. He had effaced himself, melting away through the under-wood as noiselessly and swiftly as a weasel. Plenty of the strong bear scent the old moose found in the covert, and it stung her to frenzy. She stamped and tore down the vines, and sent the rotten wood of the windfall flying in fragments. Then she emerged, powdered with débris, and roared and glared about for the enemy. But the wily bear was already far away, well burdened with discretion.

### III.

IN a few weeks the king's healthy flesh, assiduously licked by his mother, healed perfectly, leaving long, hairless scars upon his hide, which turned, in course of time, from livid to a leaden whitish hue. But while his flesh healed perfectly, his spirit was in a different case. Thenceforward, one great fear lurked in his heart, ready to leap forth at any instant — the fear of the bear. It was the only fear he knew, but it was a terrible one; and when, two months later, he again caught that pungent scent in passing a thicket, he ran madly for an hour before he recovered his wits and stole back, humiliated and exhausted, to his mother's pasture-grounds.

In the main, however, he was soon his old, bold, investigating self, his bulk and his sagacity growing vastly together.

Ere the first frosts had crimsoned the maples and touched the birches to a shimmer of pale gold, he could almost hold his own by sheer strength against his yearling brother's weight, and sometimes, for a minute or two, worst him by feint and strategy. When he came, by chance, in the crisp, free-roving weather of the fall, upon other moose-calves of that year's birth, they seemed pygmies beside him, and gave way to him respectfully as to a yearling.

About this time he experienced certain qualms of loneliness, which bewildered him and took much of the interest out of life. His mother began to betray an unexpected indifference, and his childish heart missed her caresses. He was not driven away, but he was left to himself; while she would stride up and down the open, gravelly meadows by the water, sniffing the air, and at times uttering a short, harsh roar which made him eye her uneasily. One crisp night, when the round October moon wrought magic in the wilderness, he heard his mother's call

answered by a terrific, roaring bellow, which made his heart leap. Then there was a crashing through the underbrush; and a tall bull strode forth into the light, his antlers spreading like oak branches from either side of his forehead. Prudence, or deference, or a mixture of the two, led the young king to lay aside his wonted inquisitiveness and withdraw into the thickets without attracting the notice of this splendid and formidable visitor. During the next few days he saw the big bull very frequently, and found himself calmly ignored. Prudence and deference continued their good offices, however, and he was careful not to trespass on the big stranger's tolerance during those wild, mad, magical autumn days.

One night, about the middle of October, the king saw from his thicket a scene which filled him with excitement and awe, swelled his veins almost to bursting, and made his brows ache, as if the antlers were already pushing to birth beneath the skin. It all came

about in this fashion. His mother, standing out in the moonlight by the water, had twice with outstretched muzzle uttered her call, when it was answered not only by her mate, the tall bull, approaching along the shore, but by another great voice from up the hillside. Instantly the tall bull was in a rage. He rushed up to the cow, touched her with his nose, and then, after a succession of roars which were answered promptly from the hillside, he moved over to the edge of the open and began thrashing the bushes with his antlers. A great crashing of underbrush arose some distance away, and drew near swiftly; and in a few minutes another bull burst forth violently into the open. He was young and impetuous, or he would have halted a moment before leaving cover, and stealthily surveyed the situation. But not yet had years and overthrows taught him the ripe moose wisdom; and with a reckless heart he committed himself to the combat.

The newcomer had barely the chance

to see where he was, before the tall bull was upon him. He wheeled in time, however, and got his guard down; but was borne back upon his haunches by the terrific shock of the charge. In a moment or two he recovered the lost ground, for youth had given him strength, if not wisdom; and the tall bull, his eyes flame-red with wrath, found himself fairly matched by this shorter, stockier antagonist.

The night forthwith became tempestuous with gruntings, bellowings, the hard clashing of antlers, the stamping of swift and heavy feet. The thin turf was torn up. The earthy gravel was sent flying from the furious hoofs. From his covert the young king strained eager eyes upon the fight, his sympathies all with the tall bull whom he had regarded reverently from the first moment he saw him. But as for the cow, she moved up from the waterside and looked on with a fine impartiality. What concerned her was chiefly that none but the bravest and strongest should be her mate, — a



question which only fighting could determine. Her favour would go with victory.

As it appeared, the rivals were fairly matched in vigour and valour. But among moose, as among men, brains count in the end. When the tall bull saw that, in a matter of sheer brawn, the sturdy stranger might hold him, he grew disgusted at the idea of settling such a vital question by mere butting and shoving. The red rage faded in his eyes, and a colder light took its place. On a sudden, when his foe had given a mighty thrust, he yielded, slipped his horns from the lock, and jumped nimbly aside. The stranger lunged forward, almost stumbling to his knees.

This was the tall bull's opportunity. In a whirlwind of fury he thrust upon the enemy's flank, goring him, and bearing him down. The latter, being short and quick-moving, recovered his feet in a second, and wheeled to present his guard. But the tall bull was quick to maintain the advantage. He, too, had

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shifted ground; and now he caught his antagonist in the rear. There was no resisting such an attack. With hind legs weakly doubling under him, with the weight of doom descending upon his defenceless rump, the rash stranger was thrust forward, bellowing madly, and striving in vain to brace himself. His humiliation was complete. With staring eyes and distended nostrils he was hustled across the meadow and over the edge of the bank. With a huge splash, and carrying with him a shower of turf and gravel, he fell into the stream. Once in the water, and his courage well cooled, he did not wait for a glance at his snorting and stamping conqueror on the bank above, but waded desperately across, dripping, bleeding, crushed in spirit,—and vanished into the woods. In the thicket, the king's heart swelled as if the victory had been his own.

By and by, when the last of the leaves had fluttered down with crisp whisperings from the birch and ash, maple and poplar, and the first enduring snows

were beginning to change the face of the world, the tall bull seemed to lay aside his haughtiness. He grew carelessly good-natured toward the young king and the yearling, and frankly took command of the little herd. As the snow deepened, he led the way northward toward the Nictau Lake and chose winter quarters on the wooded southward slopes of Bald Mountain, where there were hemlock groves for shelter and an abundance of young hardwood growth for browsing.

This leisurely migration was in the main uneventful, and left but one sharp impression on the young king's memory. On a wintry morning, when the sunrise was reaching long pink-saffron fingers across the thin snow, a puff of wind brought with it from a tangle of stumps and rocks a breath of that pungent scent so hateful to a moose's nostrils. The whole herd stopped; and the young king, his knees quaking under him and his eyes staring with panic, crowded close against his mother's flank. The tall bull

stamped and bellowed his defiance to the enemy, — but the enemy, being discreet, made no reply whatever. It is probable, indeed, that he was preparing his winter quarters, and getting too drowsy to hear or heed the angry challenge; but if he did hear it no doubt he noiselessly withdrew himself till the dangerous travellers had gone by. In a few minutes the herd resumed its march, — the king keeping close to his mother's side, instead of in his proper place in the line.

The big-antlered bull now chose his site for the "yard," with "verge and room enough" for all contingencies. The "yard" was an ample acreage of innumerable winding paths, trodden ever deeper as the snows accumulated. These paths led to every spot of browse, every nook of shelter, at the same time twisting and crossing in a maze of intricacies. Thick piled the snows about the little herd, and the northern gales roared over the hemlocks, and the frost sealed the white world down into silence. But it was such a winter as the moose kin loved. No



“THICK PILED THE SNOWS ABOUT THE LITTLE HERD.”



wolves or hunters came to trouble them, and the months passed pleasantly. When the days were lengthening and the hearts of all the wild folks beginning to dream of the yet unsignalled spring, the young king was astonished to see the great antlers of his leader fall off. Seeing that their owner left them lying unregarded on the snow, he went up and sniffed at them wonderingly, and pondered the incident long and vainly in his heart.

When the snows shrank away, departing with a sound of many waters, and spring returned to the Tobique country, the herd broke up. First the dis-antlered bull drifted off on his own affairs. Then the two-year-old went, with no word of reason or excuse. Though a well-grown young bull, he was now little larger or heavier than the king; and the king was now a yearling, with the stature and presence of a two-year-old. In a playful butting contest, excited by the joy of life which April put into their veins, he worsted his elder brother; and this, per-

haps, though taken in good part, hastened the latter's going.

A few days later the old cow grew restless. She and the king turned their steps backward toward the Mamozekel, feeding as they went. Soon they found themselves in their old haunts, which the king remembered very well. Then one day, while the king slept without suspicion of evil, the old cow slipped away stealthily, and sought her secret refuge in the heart of the cedar swamp. When the king awoke, he found himself alone in the thicket.

All that day he was most unhappy. For some hours he could not eat, but strayed hither and thither, questing and wondering. Then, when hunger drove him to browse on the tender birch-twigs, he would stop every minute or two to call in his big, gruff, pathetic bleat, and look around eagerly for an answer. No answer came from the deserting mother, by this time far away in the swamp.

But there were ears in the wilderness that heard and heeded the call of the



desolate yearling. A pair of hunting lynxes paused at the sound, licked their chops, and crept forward with a green light in their wide, round eyes.

Their approach was noiseless as thought,—but the king, on a sudden, felt a monition of their coming. Whirling sharply about, he saw them lurking in the underbrush. He recognised the breed. This was the same kind of creature which he had been ready to challenge in his first calfhood. No doubt, it would have been more prudent for him to withdraw; but he was in no mood for concession. His sore heart made him ill-tempered. His lonely bleat became a bellow of wrath. He stamped the earth, shook his head as if thrashing the underbrush with imaginary antlers, and then charged madly upon the astonished cats. This was no ordinary moose-calf, they promptly decided; and in a second they were speeding away with great bounds, gray shadows down the gray vistas of the wood. The king glared after them for a moment, and

then went back to his feeding, greatly comforted.

It was four days before his mother came back, bringing a lank calf at her heels. He was glad to see her, and contentedly renewed the companionship; but in those four days he had learned full self-reliance, and his attitude was no longer that of the yearling calf. It had become that of the equal. As for the lank little newcomer, he viewed it with careless complaisance, and no more dreamed of playing with it than if it had been a frog or a chipmunk.

The summer passed with little more event for the king than his swift increase in stature. One lesson then learned, however, though but vaguely comprehended at the time, was to prove of incalculable value in after years. He learned to shun man,—not with fear, indeed, for he never learned to fear anything except bears,—but with aversion, and a certain half-disdainful prudence. It was as if he came to recognise in man the presence of powers which he was not

anxious to put to trial, lest he should be forced to doubt his own supremacy.

It was but a slight incident that gave him the beginning of this valuable wisdom. As he lay ruminating one day beside his mother and the gaunt calf, in a spruce covert near the water, a strange scent was wafted in to his nostrils. It carried with it a subtle warning. His mother touched him with her nose, conveying a silent yet eloquent monition, and got upon her feet with no more sound than if she had been compact of thistle-down. From their thicket shelter the three stared forth, moveless and unwinking, ears forward, nostrils wide. Then a canoe with two men came into view, paddling lazily, and turning to land. To the king, they looked not dangerous; but every detail of them — their shape, motion, colour, and, above all, their ominous scent — stamped itself in his memory. Then, to his great surprise, his mother silently signalled the gravest and most instant menace, and forthwith faded back through the thicket

with inconceivably stealthy motion. The king and the calf followed with like care, — the king, though perplexed, having faith in his mother's wise woodcraft. Not until they had put good miles between themselves and strange-smelling newcomers did the old moose call a halt; and from all this precaution the king realised that the mysterious strangers were something to be avoided by moose.

That summer the king saw nothing more of the man-creatures, — and he crossed the scent of no more bears. His great heart, therefore, found no check to its growing arrogance and courage. When the month of the falling leaves and the whirring partridge-coveys again came round, he felt a new pugnacity swelling in his veins, and found himself uttering challenges, he knew not why, with his yet half infantile bellow. When, at length, his mother began to pace the open meadow by the Mamozekel, and startle the moonlit silences with her mating call, he was filled with

strange anger. But this was nothing to his rage when the calls were answered by a wide-antlered bull. This time the king refused to slink obsequiously to cover. He waited in the open; and he eyed the new wooer in a fashion so truculent that at length he attracted notice.

For his dignity, if not for his experience, this was most unfortunate. The antlered stranger noted his size, his attitude of insolence, and promptly charged upon him. He met the charge, in his insane audacity, but was instantly borne down. As he staggered to his feet he realised his folly, and turned to withdraw, — not in terror, but in acknowledgment of superior strength. Such a dignified retreat, however, was not to be allowed him. The big bull fell upon him again, prodding him cruelly. He was hustled ignominiously across the meadow, and into the bushes. Thence he fled, bleating with impotent wrath and shame.

In his humiliation he fled far down

along the river, through alder swamps which he had never traversed, by pools in which he had never pulled the lilies. Onward he pressed, intent on placing irrevocably behind him the scene of his chagrin.

At length he came out upon the fair river basin where the Mamozekel, the Serpentine, and the Nictau, tameless streams, unite to form the main Tobique. Here he heard the call of a young cow, — a voice thinner and higher than his mother's deep-chested notes. With an impulse that he did not understand, he pushed forward to answer the summons, no longer furtive, but noisily trampling the brush. Just then, however, a pungent smell stung his nostrils. There, not ten paces distant, was a massive black shape standing out in the moonlight. Panic laid grip upon his heart, chilling every vein. He wheeled, splashed across the shallow waters of the Nictau, and fled away northward on tireless feet.

That winter the king yarded alone, like

a morose old bull, far from his domain of the Mamozekel. In the spring he came back, but restricted his range to the neighbourhood of the Forks. And he saw his mother no more.

That summer he grew his first antlers. As antlers, indeed, they were no great thing; but they started out bravely, a massive cylindrical bar thrusting forth laterally, unlike the pointing horns of deer and caribou, from either side of his forehead. For all this sturdy start, their spiking and palmation did not amount to much; but he was inordinately proud of them, rubbing off the velvet with care when it began to itch, and polishing assiduously at the hardened horn. By the time the October moon had come round again to the Tobique country, he counted these first antlers a weapon for any encounter; and, indeed, with his bulk and craft behind them, they were formidable.

It was not long before they were put to the test. One night, as he stood roaring and thrashing the bushes on the

bluff overlooking the Forks, he heard the call of a young cow a little way down the shore. Gladly he answered. Gladly he sped to the tryst. Strange ecstasies, the madness of the night spell, and the white light's sorcery made his heart beat and his veins run sweet fire. But suddenly all this changed; for another roar, a taunting challenge, answered him; and another bull broke from covert on the other side of the sandy level where stood the young cow coquettishly eyeing both wooers.

The new arrival was much older than the king and nobly antlered; but in matter of inches the young king was already his peer. In craft, arrogance, and self-confident courage the king had an advantage that outweighed the deficiency in antlers. The fury of his charge spelled victory from the first; and though the battle was prolonged, the issue was decided at the outset, as the interested young cow soon perceived. In about a half-hour it was all over. The wise white moon of the wilderness looked



down understandingly upon the furrowed sandspit, the pleased young cow, and the king making diffident progress with his first wooing. Some distance down the river-bank, she caught glimpses of the other bull, whose antlers had not saved him, fleeing in shame, with bleeding flanks and neck, through the light-patched shadows of the forest.

#### IV.

DURING the next four years the king learned to grow such antlers as had never before been seen in all the Tobique country. So tall, impetuous, and masterful he grew, that the boldest bulls, recognising the vast reverberations of his challenge, would smother their wrath and slip noiselessly away from his neighbourhood. Rumours of his size and his great antlers in some way got abroad among the settlements; but so crafty was he in shunning men, — whom he did not really fear, and whom he was wont to study intently from safe coverts, — that there was never a hunter who could boast of having got a shot at him.

Once, and once only, did he come into actual, face to face conflict with the strange man-creature. It was one au-

tumn evening, at the first of the season. By the edge of a little lake, he heard the call of a cow. Having already found a mate, he was somewhat inattentive, and did not answer; but something strange in the call made him suspicious, and he stole forward, under cover, to make an observation. The call was repeated, seeming to come from a little, rushy island, a stone's throw from shore. This time there came an answer, — not from the king, but from an eager bull rushing up from the outlet of the lake. The king listened, with some lazy interest, to the crashing and slashing of the impetuous approach, thinking that if the visitor were big enough to be worth while he would presently go out and thrash him. When the visitor did appear, however, bursting from the underbrush and striding boldly down to the water's edge, a strange thing happened. From the rushy island came a spurt of flame, a sharp detonating report. The bull jumped and wheeled in his tracks. Another report, and he dropped without

a kick. As he lay in the pale light, close to the water, a canoe shot out from the rushy island and landed some distance from the body. Two men sprang out. They pulled up the canoe, leaving their rifles in it, and ran up to skin the prize.

The king in his hiding-place understood. This was what men could do, — make a strange, menacing sound, and kill moose with it. He boiled with rage at this exhibition of their power, and suddenly took up the quarrel of the slain bull. But by no means did he lay aside his craft. Noiselessly he moved, a vast and furtive shadow, down through the thickets to a point where the underbrush nearly touched the water. This brought him within a few yards of the canoe, wherein the hunters had left their rifles. Here he paused a few moments, pondering. But as he pondered, redder and redder grew his eyes; and suddenly, with a mad roar, he burst from cover and charged.

Had the two men not been expert woodsmen, one or the other would have

been caught and smashed to pulp. But their senses were on the watch. Cut off as they were from the canoe and from their weapons, their only hope was a tree. Before the king was fairly out into view, they had understood the whole situation, sprung to their feet, and sped off like hares. Just within the nearest fringe of bushes grew a low-hanging beech-tree; and into this they swung themselves, just as the king came raging beneath. As it was, one of them was nearly caught when he imagined himself quite safe. The king reared his mighty bulk against the trunk and with his keen-spiked antlers reached upward fiercely after the fugitives, the nearest of whom was saved only by a friendly branch which intervened.

For nearly an hour the king stamped and stormed beneath the branches, while the trapped hunters alternately cursed his temper and wondered at his stature. Then, with a swift change of purpose, he wheeled and charged on the canoe. In two minutes the graceful craft was re-

duced to raw material, while the hunters in the tree-top, sputtering furiously, vowed vengeance. All the kit, the tins, the blankets, the boxes, were battered shapeless, and the rifles thumped well down into the wet sand. In the midst of the cataclysm, one of the rifles somehow went off. The noise and the flash astonished the king, but only added to his rage and made him more thorough in his work of destruction. When there was nothing left that seemed worth trampling upon, he returned to the tree, — on which he had kept eye all the time, — and there nursed his wrath all night. At the first of dawn, however, he came to the conclusion that the shivering things in the tree were not worth waiting for. He swung off, and sought his favourite pasturage, a mile or two away; and the men, after making sure of his departure, climbed down. They nervously cut some steaks from the bull which they had killed, and hurried away, crestfallen, on the long tramp back to the settlements.

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This incident, however, did not have the effect which it might have been expected to have. It did not make the king despise men. On the contrary, he now knew them to be dangerous, and he also knew that their chief power lay in the long dark tubes which spit fire and made fierce sounds. It was enough for him that he had once worsted them. Ever afterward he gave them wide berth. And the tradition of him would have come at last to be doubted in the settlements, but for the vast, shed antlers occasionally found lying on the diminished snows of March.

But all the time, while the king waxed huge and wise, and overthrew his enemies, and begot great offspring that, for many years after he was dead, were to make the Mamozekel famous, there was one grave incompleteness in his sovereignty. His old panic fear of bears still shamed and harassed him. The whiff of a harmless half-grown cub, engrossed in stuffing its greedy red mouth with blueberries, was enough to turn his blood to

water and send him off to other feeding-grounds. He chose his ranges, indeed, first of all for their freedom from the dreaded taint, and only second for the excellence of their pasturage. This one unreasoning fear was the drop of gall which went far toward embittering all the days of his singularly favoured life. It was as if the wood-gods, after endowing him so far beyond his fellows, had repented of their lavishness, and capriciously poisoned their gifts.

One autumn night, just at the beginning of the calling season, this weakness of his betrayed the king to the deepest humiliation which had ever befallen him. He was then nearly seven years old; and because his voice was known to every bull in the Tobique country, there was never answer made when his great challenge went stridently resounding over the moonlit wastes. But on this particular night, when he had roared perhaps for his own amusement, or for the edification of his mate, who browsed nearby, rather than with any expectation of



response, to his astonishment there came an answering defiance from the other side of the open. A big, wandering bull, who had strayed up from the Grand River region, had never heard of the king, and was more than ready to put his valour to test. The king rushed to meet him. Now it chanced that between the approaching giants was an old ash-tree growing out of a thicket. In this thicket a bear had been grubbing for roots. When he heard the king's first roar, he started to steal away from the perilous proximity; but the second bull's answer, from the direction in which he had hoped to retreat, stopped him. In much perturbation he climbed the ash-tree to a safe distance, and curled himself into a black, furry ball, in a fork of the branches.

The night was still, and no scents wafting to sensitive nostrils. With short roars, and much thrashing of the underbrush, the two bulls drew near. When the king was just about abreast of the bear's hiding-place, his arrogance broke into

fury, and he charged upon the audacious stranger. Just as he did so, and just as his foe sprang to meet him, a wilful night-wind puffed lightly through the branches. It was a very small, irresponsible wind; but it carried sharply to the king's nostrils the strong, fresh taint of bear.

The smell was so strong, it seemed to the king as if the bear must be fairly on his haunches. It was like an icy cataract flung upon him. He shrank, trembled, — and the old wounds twinged and cringed. The next moment, to the triumphant amazement of his antagonist, he had wheeled aside to avoid the charge, and was off through the underbrush in ignominious flight. The newcomer, who, for all his stout-heartedness, had viewed with concern the giant bulk of his foe, stopped short in his tracks and stared in bewilderment. So easy a victory as this was beyond his dreams, — even beyond his desires. However, a bull moose can be a philosopher on occasion, and this one was not going to quarrel with



"WAS OFF THROUGH THE UNDERBUSH IN IGNOMINIOUS FLIGHT."



good luck. In high elation he strode on up the meadow, and set himself, not unsuccessfully, to wooing the deserted and disgusted cow.

His triumph, however, was short-lived. About moonrise of the following night the king came back. He was no longer thinking of bears, and his heart was full of wrath. His vast challenge came down from the near-by hills, making the night resound with its short, explosive thunders. His approach was accompanied by the thrashing of giant antlers on the trees, and by a crashing as if the undergrowths were being trodden by a locomotive. There was grim omen in the sounds; and the cow, waving her great ears back and forward thoughtfully, eyed the Grand River bull with shrewd interest. The stranger showed himself game, no whit daunted by threatenings and thunder. He answered with brave roarings, and manifested every resolution to maintain his conquest. But sturdy and valorous though he was, all his prowess went for little when the king

fell upon him, thrice terrible from the memory of his humiliation. There was no such thing as withstanding that awful charge. Before it the usurper was borne back, borne down, overwhelmed, as if he had been no more than a yearling calf. He had no chance to recover. He was trampled and ripped and thrust onward, a helpless sprawl of unstrung legs and outstretched, piteous neck. It was luck alone, — or some unwonted kindness of the wood-spirits, — that saved his life from being trodden and beaten out in that hour of terror. It was close to the river-bank that he had made his stand; and presently, to his great good fortune, he was thrust over the brink. He fell into the water with a huge splash. When he struggled to his feet, and moved off, staggering, down the shallow edges of the stream, the king looked over and disdained to follow up the vengeance.

Fully as he had vindicated himself, the king was never secure against such a humiliation so long as he rested thrall

to his one fear. The threat of the bear hung over him, a mystery of terror which he could not bring himself to face. But at last, and in the season of his weakness, when he had shed his antlers, there came a day when he was forced to face it. Then his kingliness was put to the supreme trial.

He was now at the age of nine years, in the splendour of his prime. He stood over seven feet high at the shoulders, and weighed perhaps thirteen hundred pounds. His last antlers, those which he had shed two months before, had shown a gigantic spread of nearly six feet.

It was late April. Much honey-combed snow and ice still lingered in the deeper hollows. After a high fashion of his own, seldom followed among the moose of the Tobique region, the king had rejoined his mate when she emerged from her spring retreat with a calf at her flank. He was too lordly in spirit to feel cast down or discrowned when his head was shorn of its great ornament;

and he never felt the spring moroseness which drives most bull moose into seclusion. He always liked to keep his little herd together, was tolerant to the yearlings, and even refrained from driving off the two-year-olds until their own aggressiveness made it necessary.

On this particular April day, the king was bestriding a tall poplar sapling, which he had borne down that he might browse upon its tender, sap-swollen tips. By the water's edge the cow and the yearling were foraging on the young willow shoots. The calf, a big-framed, enterprising youngster two weeks old, almost as fine a specimen of young moosehood as the king had been at his age, was poking about curiously to gather knowledge of the wilderness world. He approached a big gray-white boulder, whose base was shrouded in spruce scrub, and sniffed apprehensively at a curious, pungent taint that came stealing out upon the air.

He knew by intuition that there was peril in that strange scent; but his inter-



est overweighed his caution, and he drew close to the spruce scrub. Close, and yet closer; and his movement was so unusual that it attracted the attention of the king, who stopped browsing to watch him intently. A vague, only half-realised memory of that far-off day when he himself, a lank calf of the season, went sniffing curiously at a thicket, stirred in his brain; and the stiff hair along his neck and shoulder began to bristle. He released the poplar sapling, and turned all his attention to the behaviour of the calf.

The calf was very close to the green edges of the spruce scrub, when he caught sight of a great dark form within, which had revealed itself by a faint movement. More curious than ever, but now distinctly alarmed, he shrank back, turning at the same time, as if to investigate from another and more open side of the scrub.

The next instant a black bulk lunged forth with incredible swiftness from the green, and a great paw swung itself with

a circular, sweeping motion, upon the retreating calf. In the wilderness world, as in the world of men, history has a trick of repeating itself; and this time, as on that day nine years before, the bear was just too late. The blow did not reach its object till most of its force was spent. It drew blood, and knocked the calf sprawling, but did no serious damage. With a bleat of pain and terror, the little animal jumped to its feet and ran away.

The bear would have easily caught him before he could recover himself; but another and very different voice had answered the bleat of the calf. At the king's roar of fury the bear changed his plans and slunk back into hiding. In a moment the king came thundering up to the edge of the spruces. There, planting his fore-feet suddenly till they ploughed the ground, he stopped himself with a mighty effort. The smell of the bear had smitten him in the face.

The moment was a crucial one. The pause was full of fate. Turning his

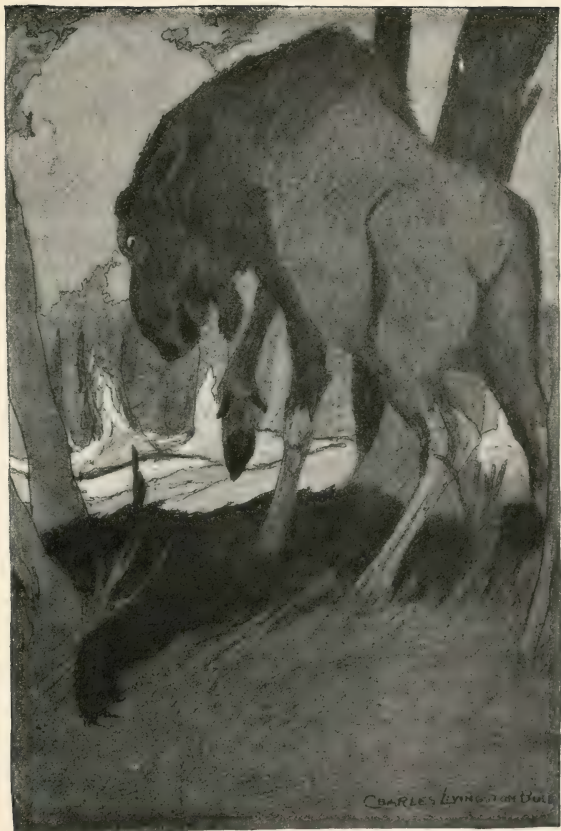
head in indecision, he caught a cry of pain from the calf as it ran to its mother; and he saw the blood streaming down its flank. Then the kingliness of his heart arose victorious. With a roar, he breasted trampling into the spruce scrub, heedless at last of the dreaded scent.

The bear, meanwhile, had been seeking escape. He had just emerged on the other side of the spruces, and was slipping off to find a secure tree. As the king thundered down upon him, he wheeled with a savage growl, half squatted back, and struck out sturdily with that redoubtable paw. But at the same instant the king's edged hoofs came down upon him with the impact of a battering-ram. They smashed in his ribs. They tore open his side. They hurled him over so that his belly was exposed. He was at a hopeless disadvantage. He had not an instant for recovery. Those avenging hoofs, with the power of a pile-driver behind them, smote like lightning. The bear struck

savagely, twice, thrice; and his claws tore their way through hide and muscle till the king's blood gushed scarlet over his prostrate foe's dark fur. Then the growls and the claw-strokes ceased; and the furry shape lay still, outstretched, unresisting.

For a moment or two the king drew off, and eyed the carcass. Then the remembrance of all his past terror and shame surged hotly through him. He pounced again upon the body, and pounded it, and trampled it, and ground it down, till the hideous mass bore no longer a resemblance to anything that ever carried the breath of life. It was not his enemy only, not only the assailant of the helpless calf, that he was thus completely blotting from existence, but it was fear itself that he was wiping out.

At last, grown suddenly tired of rage, and somewhat faint from the red draining of his veins, the king turned away and sought his frightened herd. They gathered about him, trembling with excitement, — the light-coated cow, the



"IT WAS FEAR ITSELF THAT HE WAS WIPING OUT."



dark yearling, the lank, terrified calf. They stretched thin noses toward him, questioning, wondering, troubled at his hot, streaming wounds. But the king held his head high, heeding neither the wounds nor the herd. He cast one long, proud look up the valley of the Mamozekel, his immediate, peculiar domain. Then he looked southward over the lonely Serpentine, northward across the dark-wooded Nictau, and westward down the flood of the full, united stream. He felt himself supreme now beyond challenge over all the wild lands of Tobique.

For a long time the group stood so, breathing at last quietly, still with that stillness which the furtive kindreds know. There was no sound save the soft, ear-filling roar of the three rivers, swollen with freshet, rushing gladly to their confluence. The sound was as a background to the cool, damp silence of the April wilderness. Some belated snow in a shaded hollow close at hand shrank and settled with a hushed, evasive whisper. Then the earliest white-

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throat, from the top of a fir-tree, fluted across the pregnant spring solitudes the six clear notes of his musical and melancholy call.

THE END.



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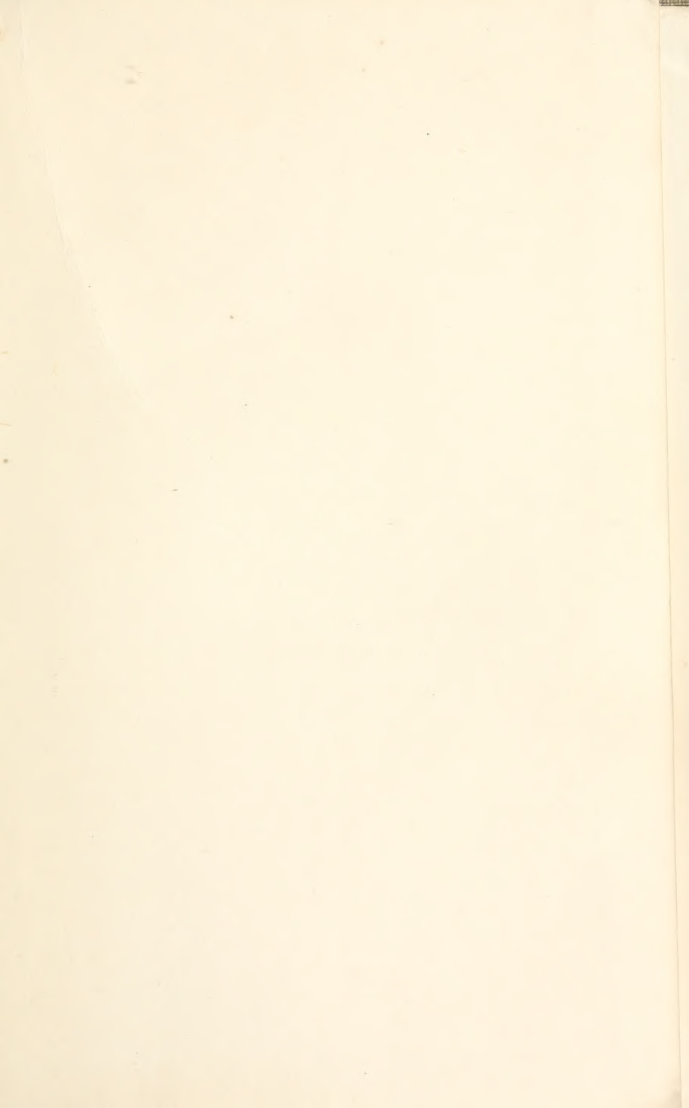
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